



The leaders of engagement: A descriptive analysis

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Summary

The incorporation of service-learning coordinators and community engagement directors into the organizational structure of the university has successfully contributed to the acceptance of engaged scholarship within the academy (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Furco & Holland, 2004; 2009; Holland, 1997). However, very little is actually known about the individual characteristics of who is leading the engagement movement.

Our research provides an empirical description of the leaders of engagement across gender, region, and institutional type and considers the gender distribution among leaders of engagement, the relationship between institutional type and leaders of engagement, and the relationship between geographical region and leaders of engagement. Participant applications and conference materials from Virginia Tech's Engagement Academy for University leaders from 2008-2012 provides the basis of our data collection.

From the perspective of Neo-institutional Theory, our research provides key information on the individual characteristics of the leaders of the engagement movement. Neoinstitutional Theory provides a theoretical framework to examine how elements of the individual or micro-level factors can be leveraged to influence the larger organizational structure of the academy (Phillips & Malhotra, 2008; Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Preliminary results show that there is not a wide gender gap between male and female leaders of engagement. However, a slight difference between gender distribution emerges when we control for institutional type. Results also show that most of the leaders of engagement are representing Research I universities and leaders of engagement from the Southwest were underrepresented.

Our research provides descriptive details on who is actually leading the engagement movement. The need for this research is demonstrated by the reliance on anecdotal evidence to describe the individual characteristics of leaders of engagement. This work also pushes the field to consider elements of institutionalizing engaged scholarship within the academy at a different unit of analysis.

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